

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, IT, VT
SUBJECT: ITALIAN PARLIAMENT RESUMES ABORTION DEBATE

1. ABORTION LEGISLATION RETURNS FOR DEBATE IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES, BEGINNING APRIL 5. THIS DEBATE, IN CONTRAST TO REVIOUS CONSIDERATIONS OF THE BILL WHCIH BEGAN IN 1975, TAKES PLACE IN A LESS HEATED PARTISAN ATMOSPHERE.

2. MOST OBSERVERS AGREE THAT PRESENTLH THERE IS A CLIMATE OF COMPROMISE AMONG THE MAJOR PARTIES REGARDING ABORTION. THE PCI HAS STATED THAT A FERERENDUM SHOULD BE AVOIDED AND THE PRO-ABORTION FRONT HAS A RESPONSIBILITY TO SEEK WAYS OF COMPROMISE WITH THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (DC). THE DC HAS STATED THAT, WHILE ITS POISITION WILL BE "CLEAR AND UNITED" IN SEEKING SUBSTANTIAL AMENDEMENT OF THE BILL, IT WILL NOT INTERPOSE "OBSTRUCTIONIST TACTICS" IN THE PARLIAMENTARY CONSIDERATION. BOTH PARTIES, HOWEVER, FACE STRONG PRESSURE AGAINST COMPROMISE: THE PCI FROM A SIGNIFICANT SECTOR OF UDI (THE COMMUNIST-CONTROLLED UNION OF DEMOCRATIC WOMEN), WHICH HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE APRIL 4 IN WHICH THEY DISOWNED SOME DUI LEADERS FOR LEANING TOWARD COMPRMISE AND CALLED FOR A LARGE FEMINIST DEMONSTRATION FOR APRIL 8. THE DC FACES PRESSURE FROM THE

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CHURCH WHICH REMAINS ADAMANTLY OPPOSED TO ABORTION UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES AND FROM THE MOVEMENT FOR LIFE A CITIZEN-ACTION GOUP. THE LATTER, WHICH HAS COLLECTED OVER 1 MILLION SIGNATURES FOR A COUNTER LAW WHICH WOULD LAY EMPHASIS ON FAMILY COUNSELING, ADOPTION PROCEDURES AND THE PREVENTION OF ABORTION SENT LETTERS TO THE PCI, THE DC AND THE "LAY PARTIES" ON APRIL 4 OPPOSING THE BILL. IN ADDITION, THE COUNCIL OF THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE

WILL BE MEETING IN ROME THIS WEEK AND IS EXPECTED TO
REITERATE THE CHURCH'S STRONG OPPOSITION.

3. TWO OTHER FACTORS, HOWEVER, ARE WORKING FOR COMPROMISE.
NEARLY ALL THE POLITICAL PARTIES WISH TO AVOID A REFERENDUM
BECAUSE IT IS BELIEVED IT WOULD BE DIVISIVE AND, IF APPROVED,
WOULD RESULT IN ELIMINATING ALL REGULATION OF ABORTION. THE
OTHER IS A RECENT DOXA POLL WHICH INDICATED THAT LARGE MAJORITY
(80 PERCENT) OF ITALIANS APPROVE ABORTION IF LIMITED CASES--
MALFORMATION, DANGER TO LIFE OF MOTHER AND THAT SOME 50 PERCENT
OF THE ELECTORATE APPROVE ABORTION FOR ECONOMIC REASONS.
A MAJORITY OF 61 PERCENT, HOWEVER, ARE OPPOSED TO ABORTION ON
DEMAND.

4. THESE TWO FACTORS HAVE MADE A SPECIAL IMPRINT ON THE DC.
THE DC STRATEGY IN THE CURRENT DEBATE, THEREFORE, WILL
CONSIST OF AN EFFORT TO AMEND, BUT NOT OBSTRUCT, THE LEGISLATION.
ALTHOUGH IT WILL PROPOSE SOME 30 AMENDMENT, THERE IS ALREADY A
CONSENSUS ON TWO KEY ONES: ONE WHICH WOULD INCREASE THE AGE
FROM 16 TO 18 FOR ABORTION WITHOUT PARENTAL CONSENT, AND
THE OTHER WOULD MODIFY THE "SELF-DETERMINATION" OF THE WOMAN
BY REQUIRING THAT IN THE CASE OF MARRIED WOMEN, THE HUSBAND,
TOO, MUST BE CONSULTED IN THE DECISION TO ABORT.

5. COMMENT: MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE THAT THE PRESENT EFFORT
TOWARDS A COMPROMISE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL IF THE PARLIAMENT
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ACTS QUICKLY ON THE ISSUE. UNDUE DELAY COULD RE-INFLAME THE
EMOTIONAL INTENSITY OF THE ISSUE AND THEREBY DERAILED THE
PLANS OF THE TWO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES. HOLMES

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